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SUBJECT: THE AMBASSADOR AND PRESIDENT-ELECT LOBO DISCUSS
POLITICAL AND POLICY MATTERS

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met with Honduran President-elect Porfirio "Pepe" Lobo and discussed a full range of pertinent political and policy matters on December 17. Lobo told the Ambassador he remains committed to the implementation of the Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord and supported the creation of a government of national unity and a Truth Commission. He reiterated his conviction that regime leader Micheletti needed to resign for the good of the country, but sought international support for achieve this end. Lobo discussed his plans to create a strong team of technocrats to his cabinet. He said he wants to appoint fresh talent to his foreign policy team and to the congressional leadership. Lobo and the Ambassador discussed our common interest in fighting international crime and drug trafficking and agreed that the Merida Initiative provides a strategic framework for action. Lobo expressed his commitment to reassert full civilian control of the military and strengthen the rule of law and respect for human rights. He also said he supported securing political asylum or safe passage for President Zelaya. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador and President-elect Lobo met at the Residence on the afternoon of December 17 to review the current political situation. Lobo appeared relaxed and confident, although very mindful of the significant diplomatic, political and economic challenges facing Honduras. The following are the main elements of what was a lengthy 90 minute:

Tegucigalpa-San Jose Accord (TSJA)

¶3. (SBU) Lobo said he was committed to the implementation of the Tegucigalpa San Jose Accord. He pointed to a series of public statements he had made and actions taken over the past ten days in support of the TSJA. He stressed that he believed the TSJA was critical to achieve unity, national reconciliation and give Honduras the diplomatic space to restore normal relations with the international community. He cited his meeting on December 15 with congressional leaders where he had pushed for political amnesty. He said

he was keen on securing this piece of legislation, which he and President Arias believe was an important element in easing tensions and avoiding judicial chaos resulting from the multiple legal violations potentially committed by President Zelaya (and his associates), regime leader Micheletti (and his associates), and the Honduran military related to the coup and events leading up to the coup. The Ambassador and Lobo both were in full agreement that Micheletti needed to resign in order to pave the way for the creation of a government of national unity. Lobo confirmed to the Ambassador that he had discussed the matter for a second time with Micheletti on Monday, December 14. Lobo said he had told Micheletti respectfully but in a firm manner that he needed to consider resigning for the good of the nation. Lobo expressed confidence that a legal formula could be found under the Accord for him to step down, without facing a humiliating exit. Lobo told Micheletti he would be willing to work with him to achieve this objective. He said Micheletti resisted, but not as strongly as in their first meeting after the election. The Ambassador interjected that although Micheletti had stated publicly that he would not step down under any circumstances, in private he was beginning to engage in discussions with key advisors, including Arturo Corrales and Vilma Morales, on this issue. Lobo mused that in the meeting Micheletti at first boasted that he didn't care if the Americans took his visa away, but later asked, "Do you really think the gringos will give me back my visa?" Lobo took the vacillating comments as evidence that this issue was very much on his mind. Lobo and the Ambassador spoke about the possibility of Washington and others in the international community helping him on this issue. The Ambassador confirmed that messages were being passed in Washington and in Tegucigalpa to the Micheletti regime officials for him to step down. The Ambassador told Lobo in confidence that if we didn't get any movement from

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the Micheletti side, we would consider having U.S. officials come to Tegucigalpa to directly deliver a very clear and blunt message on this issue. Lobo welcomed the U.S. actions and plans.

Truth Commission

14. (SBU) The Ambassador stressed the importance of creating a Truth Commission as an important element in the TSJA that would contribute to achieving national reconciliation and healing. The Ambassador briefed Lobo on the workings of these Truth Commissions in several other countries (including Chile and South Africa) and counseled that he as President would needed to give this process guidance and direction working closely with the international community. Both discussed the possibility of inviting the Verification Commission (including Secretary Solis and President Lagos) to convene back in Tegucigalpa some time after his January 27, 2010 inauguration, and possibly contribute to the launch of the Truth Commission.

Presidential Appointments

15. (SBU) The Ambassador and Lobo discussed the make-up of his government. Lobo said he had created a series of transition working groups to assist him in forming a government. For example, former President Ricardo Maduro would be heading the foreign policy working group, which would be responsible for recommending candidates for both Foreign Minister and key ambassadorships. Lobo stressed that he wanted to appoint young and energetic people to his foreign policy team. He was considering several entrepreneurs for various key jobs, including Ambassador to the U.S. Lobo said he would review the short lists in early January and make the decisions in close consultation with the

Ambassador.

¶6. (SBU) Lobo said that would be a chief executive with a strong institutional bent who would govern in close coordination with Congress and the judicial branch. In this regard, he was weighing several names for consideration as President of the National Congress. The traditional establishment candidates included former Congress President Fito Irias, former Congress Secretary Jose Hernandez, Antonio Rivera and Celin Discua. Lobo noted that he was under great pressure from the party to name one of these "insider" politicians. However, he was considering appointing someone with a clean image, including a women legislator, to send a message of his commitment to change and to diversity.

Merida and the Fight Against International Crime

¶7. (SBU) Both the Ambassador and Lobo agreed that Honduras faced a serious threat to its national security from international crime syndicates, particularly the drug cartels. The Ambassador gave Lobo an overview of the Merida Initiative. He proposed resurrecting the two-country multiagency U.S.-Honduran Merida Task Force, which represented the most effective and holistic way for us to deal bilaterally and regionally with the international crime threat. Lobo said that one of his top priorities was dealing "head on" with the grave threat spawned by international drug cartels and gangs. He said that the Honduran people were demanding a more concerted campaign by their government to provide security and protect them against criminals. He said he would be very tough on criminals, gang members and drug traffickers, and was not sensitive to sovereignty issues when the issue of narcotics and crime was at stake. Lobo said he planned to appoint Oscar Alvarez as his Security Minister. He had great confidence in Alvarez as a courageous and dynamic leader in the fight against crime and drugs. We

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agreed to discuss these issues in more detail with our respective teams in the future.

Taming the Military

¶8. (SBU) The Ambassador said it was critically important for Lobo to establish an effective and productive relationship with the military, but equally to restore firm civilian control over the officer corps. The Ambassador noted that military's current influence permeated all senior levels of the Micheletti regime, whose authority to a significant degree rested on military acquiescence. The Ambassador said that this all needed to change. As the legitimate democratically elected president he needed to reestablish his control and authority over the military. The Ambassador added that the military had to return to the barracks and let the police deal with basic security and law enforcement. He said that even beyond the coup, the presence of large numbers of troops on Tegucigalpa's streets was an eyesore which was resented by most Hondurans, and had further undermined the international reputation of the armed forces. Looking to the longer term, the Ambassador pointed out that the Honduran government needed to reform the legal and constitutional framework to ensure that the military would never again be dragged into a political crisis that resulted in a coup d'etat. The Ambassador noted that both President Zelaya's decision to ask the military to carry out the logistics for his planned poll on June 28, as well as the military's own role in plotting and executing the coup against Zelaya, was a major political setback for Honduras. The legal reforms needed to be urgently considered to ensure that the military would never do this again.

¶9. (SBU) Lobo agreed that he needed to restore military

subservience to civilian rule. He also concurred that his government needed to consider adopting the legal and constitutional reforms necessary to distance the military from politics. As an institutionalist, he was considering supporting legislation so that the nominations of the Chief of Defense and the service commanders would be subject to congressional approval unlike at present where it was strictly a presidential decision. Obviously, the existing process in which the president fully controlled the nomination and appointment of senior military officers was open to abuse if a president chose to appoint a friend or individual who shared his political or ideological views.

Human Rights

¶10. (SBU) The Ambassador said that since the coup there had been a serious deterioration in the human rights situation in Honduras. The Micheletti regime, the Honduran military, police and the attorney general's office had all been tainted with the brush of being systemic violators of human rights. The Ambassador said that part of the process of restoring the democratic order and supporting the rule of law required the new government to be very sensitive to human rights issues. The Ambassador suggested that Lobo consider sending a clear public message once in office of his support for human rights and consider involving the human rights community in the work of the Truth Commission. Lobo said he would be open to working with local and human rights groups to restore the rule of law and strengthen human rights practices in the country.

Zelaya

¶11. (SBU) Lobo made clear that he continued to support allowing President Zelaya to leave the country either through a safe conduct pass or through the granting of political asylum. If this was not granted by Micheletti, he would

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authorize soon after assuming office.
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